

Vegetables and Fruits Tickle the Taste Buds of Kershaw County's Preschoolers

Issue

The Mayo Clinic defines childhood obesity as a serious medical condition that affects children and adolescents. It occurs when a child is well above the normal weight for his or her age and height. Childhood obesity is particularly troubling because the extra pounds often start kids on the path to health problems that were once confined to adults, such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Studies show that obesity has doubled among American children in the last 30 years and that Type 2 diabetes, traditionally an adult disease, is increasing dramatically among children and teenagers.

One reason for this increase in obesity rates is the fact that our children are not getting the recommended amounts of vegetables and fruits each day. According to the S.C. Youth Risk Behavior Survey, in 2007, 83 percent of S.C. high school students reported eating less than five servings per day. Prevention and health promotion are instrumental to changing this trend. The earlier you reach children, the more likely they will choose healthier behaviors.

Intervention

In 2007, four childcare centers in Kershaw County, previously trained to implement the Color Me Healthy curriculum, were chosen to participate in a supplemental program to introduce new vegetables and fruits to their students. This program was provided through a partnership between Kershaw County First Steps, Kershaw County Clemson University Cooperative Extension Services, and the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's Region 4. Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant funds were used to provide a Health Educator to assist teaching these supplemental classes. The following events took place:

- Each center was visited once a month from November 2007 through May 2008;
- Each month, classes received a nutrition lesson, a book reading related to nutrition, and a taste-testing demonstration; and
- Notes were sent home to parents after each class explaining what the children learned and included the recipe from the lesson.

Examples of foods that were introduced to the students included fruit kabobs, spinach dip, and fruit pizza. One of the biggest hits was a variety of raw vegetables with a tasty dip. One of the teachers commented, "You can give them anything with a dip and they will eat it."

Impact

"Hey Mikey, he likes it." This was a catchy phrase that promoted Life cereal in the 1970s and 1980s. You might think it is strange hearing similar comments from 4-year-old children when tasting vegetables and fruits. However, in Kershaw County, these are exactly the types of comments that were received. The below results were achieved:

- The students look forward to the classes each month and are eager to learn about healthy lifestyles;
- Through this program, nearly 100 children were reached with the message that vegetables and fruits are not only good for you, but taste good too;
- Students took the message that it is important to eat more vegetables and fruits to their parents; and
- Students have begun making healthier food choices and increasing their amount of daily physical activity.

Contact: Lori Phillips, MPH, CHES
S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control
1705 West Evans Street, Florence, S.C. 29501 (843) 413-6433,
phillilc@dhec.sc.gov